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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a small college's efforts to interest more psychology majors in research projects and to help all students enrolled in psychology courses improve their research and writing skills. Rather than have their students complete a literature review or term paper within the confines of one semester, faculty introduced a step-by-step procedure in which student research is incorporated into the psychology program sequence. Outlined here is the sequence of courses devised for the students. Since inception of the program, psychology instructors have reported a substantial increase in student research projects. The quality of students' work is higher, and both psychology and non-psychology majors are more interested in presenting their work at regional conferences. (RJM)

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Running Head: RESEARCH

Innovative Community College Teaching Methods

Research Through the Curriculum

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Innovative Community College Teaching Methods

Research Through the Curriculum

In the Spring of 1991, the Psychology Department at North Central Missouri College (NCMC) added an independent research course to give advanced students the opportunity to engage in more scholarly activities early in their academic career. The course was designed to take the student through the entire research process, from the initial library search (i.e., using the Psychological Abstracts) to the final written report. Students could then present their paper at one of two regional student psychology conventions: the Mid-America Psychology Conference for Community & Junior Colleges or the Great Plains Student Psychology Convention. Unfortunately, few students elected to undertake such a project, in part, because they believed they lacked the required skills, or they did not see the course's relevance so early in their academic careers.

In order to change this trend, the psychology faculty at NCMC sought answers to two questions: (1) How could we interest more psychology majors to engage in research projects? and (2) How could we help all students enrolled in psychology courses improve their research and writing skills? The result was the "Research-Through-the-Curriculum" concept which integrates and incorporates research into the psychology program sequence (Appendix A). Rather than requiring students to complete a literature review or term paper within the confines of one semester (a major expectation for those with limited experience), this step-by-step procedure introduces students to the research process at a much slower pace. It was hoped that through completing this sequence students would improve on library searching skills, better comprehend found materials, and gain more confidence in their ability to do college level work.

The Research-Through-the-Curriculum process begins in General Psychology with the Annotated Bibliography assignment (Appendix B) which helps students develop basic library "searching" skills, improve on writing abilities, and increase practice in following directions. The assignment is consistent with the NCMC English Department guidelines for annotations. Students are also provided a checklist (Appendix C) and given extra credit if they seek writing assistance in the Academic Reinforcement Center (ARC). Writing tutors in the ARC go through each checklist point with the student. The tutors also teach students the techniques for analyzing their own work. Since the checklist option was initiated, students' papers have significantly improved. Additionally, the psychology instructors have noted fewer cases of plagiarism.

Once enrolled in a psychology elective (e.g., child psychology, abnormal psychology), the student may use the same reference list as a basis for the required paper. The faculty who teach psychology electives provide constructive feedback at each phase of the paper's development, however, only the final product is graded. Although additional feedback does place a burden on the instructors' time, the quality of the students' written work has improved tremendously.

After completing English II and at least one psychology elective, students have the option of enrolling in the Independent Research course to either expand upon the paper or conduct an empirical study and present their research at a regional conference. Psychology as well as non-majors are eligible to enroll in Independent Research. Successful completion of this course gives students additional experience with APA format, the Thesaurus of Psychological Terms, and PsychLit.

Psychology majors are advised to enroll in Advanced General Psychology during their second year at NCMC. This course requires students to conduct a small-scale empirical study and

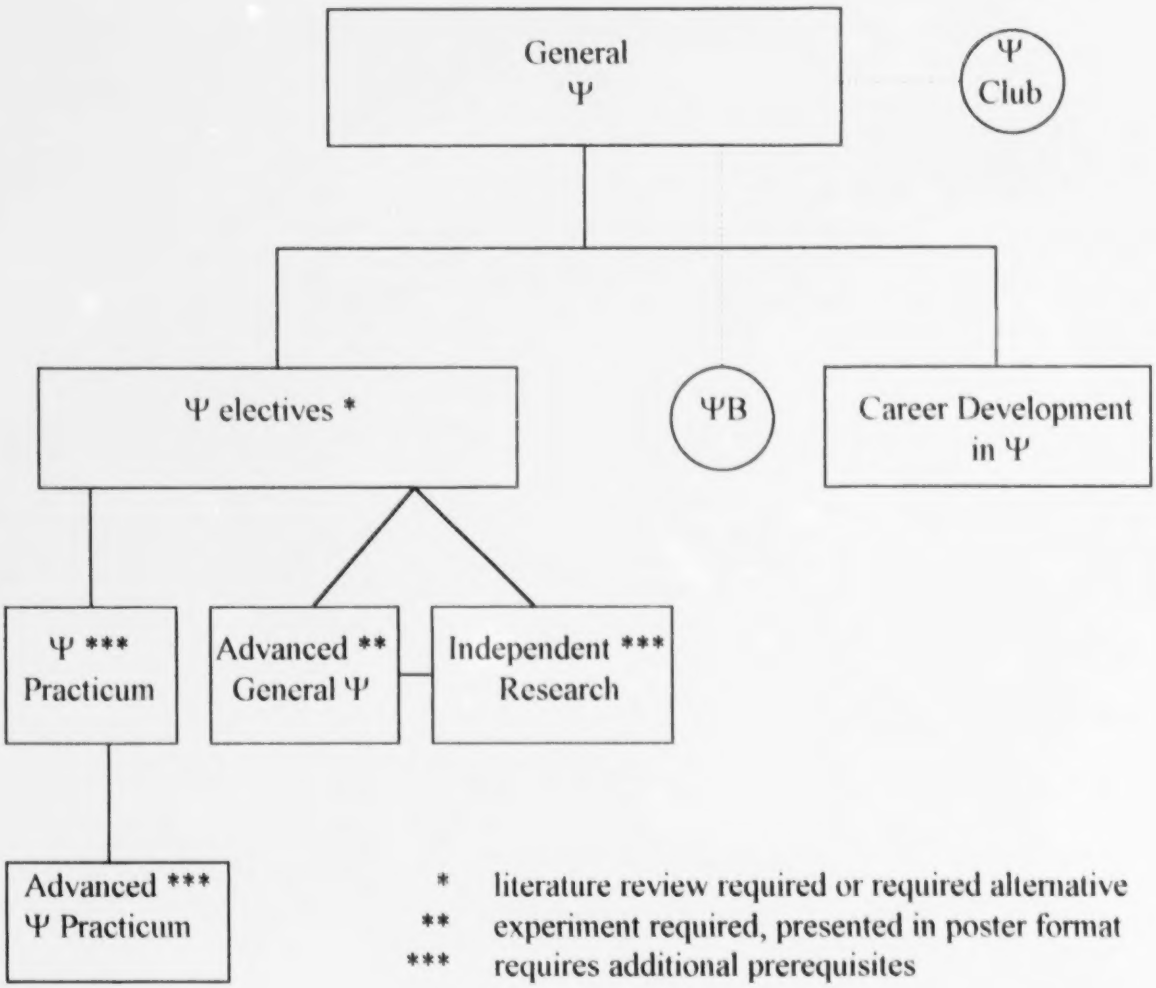
present the findings in a class poster session held at the end of the semester. These students also have the option of continuing their projects into the Independent Research course or vice-versa.

Since initiating the Research-Through-the-Curriculum concept, the psychology faculty at NCMC has seen a substantial increase in student interest in conducting research. We have also noted a much higher quality of students' written work. One unanticipated outcome of this project is that conducting research and presenting papers at the regional conferences has become "fashionable" among our students. Psi Beta and Psychology Club officers now schedule these conferences in their activity calendar. Additionally, the interest in presenting papers among non-psychology majors has increased. In 1996, 10 students presented papers at regional conferences; 4 of those were non-psychology majors. More importantly, the majority of the NCMC graduates who engaged in research projects while at NCMC have continued this pattern at their respective transfer institutions.

One final note: NCMC is a small, rural Midwestern community college with approximately 1100 full- and part-time students. However, the freshmen and sophomore status has not deterred our students from engaging in research projects, nor from presenting papers along-side juniors and seniors from the larger 4-year universities. Additionally, our students have fared quite well in regional and national competitions.

Appendix A

Recommended Sequence



* literature review required or required alternative
** experiment required, presented in poster format
*** requires additional prerequisites

Appendix B

Annotations:

An annotation describes the essential details of each book or article of your reference list. The annotation immediately follows the reference just as a paragraph. Follow these suggestions for the annotation content.

1. Explain the main purpose of the work.
2. Briefly describe the contents.
3. Note any special features.
4. Warn of any defect, weakness, or suspected bias.

Provide enough information in about 3 to 4 sentences for the reader to have a fairly clear image of the work's purpose, contents, and special value. Two sample entries follow:

Dannells, M., & Stuber, D. (1992). Mandatory psychiatric withdrawal of severely disturbed students: A study and policy recommendations. NASPA Journal, 29, 163-168. The purpose of this research was to determine the number of Kansas two- and four-year colleges with mandatory psychiatric withdrawal policies. Results revealed that not only had few colleges implemented such policies, the majority of general disciplinary codes previewed did not ensure students' privacy and due process rights, nor, adhere to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The authors also provide suggestions for college personnel to better equip themselves to deal with emotionally disturbed students.

Pavela, G. (1982). The dismissal of students with mental disorders. Asheville, NC: College Administration Publications. Citing actual court cases, Pavela discusses in detail each component of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, including federal mandates that protect mentally and emotionally disturbed students. The author warns of the legal ramifications of psychiatric withdrawal policies and disciplinary codes which are too broadly or narrowly defined.

Paper Requirements: Choose 1 subject or topic of interest and stay with that topic throughout your entire reference search. At least ten (10) annotations are required and at least six (6) must be from professional sources (i.e., other than the popular press).

Papers should consist of a title page with your name, the days and time your class meets, and topic of annotations. All papers must be typed with double-spacing between annotations (as shown above). References must be consistent with APA style and format (4th edition).

Tips: Save your annotation as well as copies of your original articles. These references can be used again as a basis for your literature review in an advanced psychology class.

Appendix C

Writing Tutor Checklist

Student Name _____

Course/Assignment _____ General Psychology/Annotated Bibliography _____

Tutor's Signature _____ Date _____

Format

_____ 1. Is the title page consistent with the directions?

_____ 2. Are the references in APA format? Are references in alphabetical order? Does the student have 10 references, 6 of which are from professional source? (Student is responsible for checking with instructor as to whether the source is professional)

_____ 3. Does the paper follow the specified format (i e , typed, single-spaced, double-spaced between annotations)?

Content

_____ 1. Does the student have 1 topic of interest, and do the annotations reflect that topic?

_____ 2. Is each annotation clear and concise and written in 2 to 4 sentences?

_____ 3. Does the content overview the book or article rather than summarize the source or resemble the Abstract? Are the annotations written in the student's own words?

Note: worth 50 points
late papers not accepted